

## Connecticut



*Waterfowl Association*

4 Pine Tree Shilling  
Unionville, Ct. 06085  
March 8, 2010

CT DEP Environment Committee  
State Office Building  
Hartford, Ct.

Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you regarding SB 207. I come before you as a member of the board of directors of the Ct Waterfowler's Assn, a delegate to the DEP Commissioner's Conservation Advisory Council, an avid sportsmen and father of three children who are active participants in the outdoor sports in Connecticut.

My message to you today is very simple, and it is as follows: The budget passed by the General Assembly in September 2009 will have dire, long-term impacts on Connecticut's fish and wildlife and will ultimately cost the State money. "Catastrophic" is not too strong a term to describe the changes enacted in 2009. Therefore, I urge you to enact legislation in 2010 that will restore a fair mechanism that will sustain funding for our fish and wildlife resources.

Specifically, there are three items that need to be addressed:

**1. Develop a fee-structure that is reasonable and comparable with neighboring states.** Given the fiscal crisis, sportsmen had expressed a willingness to support an increase of up to 25% in many of their fees. However, the 2009 legislation doubled most sportsmen's fees and raised others even higher. A fee increase of this magnitude is unreasonable and indefensible, disproportionately affecting certain segments of the public including families, seniors, and low-income citizens. Even worse, the new fee structure creates a severe impediment to recruiting new sportsmen. Nearly everyone agrees that recruitment is a critical step to maintaining and continuing the fisheries and wildlife successes of the past century.

Due to the magnitude of the fee increases, many people will stop hunting and fishing altogether, or take their business out of state. By outpricing the market, you have driven away the sportsmen who historically have funded wildlife and fisheries management. Further, without a base of revenue-generating sportsmen, how will Connecticut manage

overabundant species such as deer, geese and beaver? Alternative wildlife management will become an expensive and inefficient proposition for the General Fund.

**2. Restore the Conservation Fund and other special funds that had been established by statute.** History has shown that fish and wildlife compete poorly for general funds when money is tight. Social programs, prisons, education, health care and other issues take priority. The Conservation Fund and special funds have created a highly successful "user-pay" system in which predictable annual funding is generated for fish and wildlife research, management and habitat protection.

Ironically, many of the fees that sportsmen pay were established at their own request. The myriad of deer and turkey permits, the pheasant stamp, the Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp, the new Marine Fishing license were supported by sportsmen with the understanding that the revenue would be reinvested in the fish and wildlife resources. By diverting these monies directly to the General Fund, sportsmen support for these fees and stamps has disappeared.

**3. Restore the public's trust in the government's commitment to healthy fish and wildlife populations.** The average Connecticut citizen cares about the health of fish and wildlife and assumes that their general tax dollars are benefitting those natural resources. However, in reality, most of the funding for those resources is generated by a very small public segment of society: the sportsmen.

Sportsmen, by paying for the privilege to use surplus game animals, have relished their role as the backbone of fish and wildlife conservation. Recently other groups have become incorporated into the "user-pay" conservation model through their advocacy for and participation in voluntary financial contributions, such as the Wildlife Income Tax Checkoff and the Wildlife Conservation License Plate. However, by sweeping the funds of accounts such as these and changing the wording of the statutes, many constituents have lost faith in the government's commitment to the fish and wildlife resources they hold dear.

The seriousness of the State's budgetary crisis can not be overstated, however we must also understand that this crisis can not be addressed by a "one size fits all" approach. The fish and wildlife successes of the past century have come at very little cost to the general public. Exacerbating the attrition of sportsmen by imposing unreasonable fees will doom future efforts to manage both game and nongame species and their habitats. I urge the General Assembly to review how that State's fish and wildlife programs are currently funded and thoroughly evaluate all of the consequences of the exorbitant fee increases and the elimination of dedicated conservation accounts.

I have also included additional written documentation that supports my contentions: The first is a fact sheet that provides historical information on the background and accomplishments of the Ct Duck Stamp program, and the second is a fiscal impact

document that provides a historical reference on the negative participation impact brought on by fee increases in Ct during the 2003 timeframe.

So, in conclusion, and with these thoughts in mind, I ask you to OPPOSE the current bill language and SUPPORT the concept of lowering fees by SUPPORTING the substitute language offered by the Coalition of Connecticut Sportsmen that reduces fees to a 25% increase over previous 2009 fee levels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Proulx". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David J. Proulx  
Unionville, Ct.

On behalf of the Ct Waterfowler's Association

## CONNECTICUT MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION STAMP ("DUCK STAMP") PROGRAM

### FACT SHEET

#### Background

- The Connecticut Duck Stamp Program was initiated primarily by concerned sportsmen in the early 1990s. They worked with the DEP to develop legislation that required hunters to purchase duck stamps in order to legally hunt waterfowl. The Program was modeled after the popular and successful Federal Duck Stamp Program that uses all revenues for wetland conservation. The intent was to generate funds for waterfowl habitat conservation in Connecticut through the sale of stamps and prints to hunters, stamp collectors and art enthusiasts.
- Beginning in 1993, hunters were required to purchase a \$5.00 Connecticut Duck Stamp to hunt waterfowl in Connecticut.
- The enabling legislation (CGS 26-27c), specifically mandated that all funds *...shall only be used for the development, management, preservation, conservation, acquisition, purchase and maintenance of waterfowl habitat and wetlands and the purchase or acquisition of recreational interests relating to migratory birds.*
- The sale of these stamps (and collector art prints from 1993 through 2003) has generated over \$1,200,000.
- In 2005, the DEP raised the price of the stamp to \$10.00 to generate additional funds for wetland conservation. This increase was strongly supported by waterfowl hunters who were pleased with the many successful wetland restoration and enhancement projects that the Duck Stamp Program had funded statewide.
- In 2009, the Duck Stamp fund was "swept" and changes made to the legislation to increase the price of the stamp to \$15.00 with the revenues now going into the General Fund.

#### Accomplishments

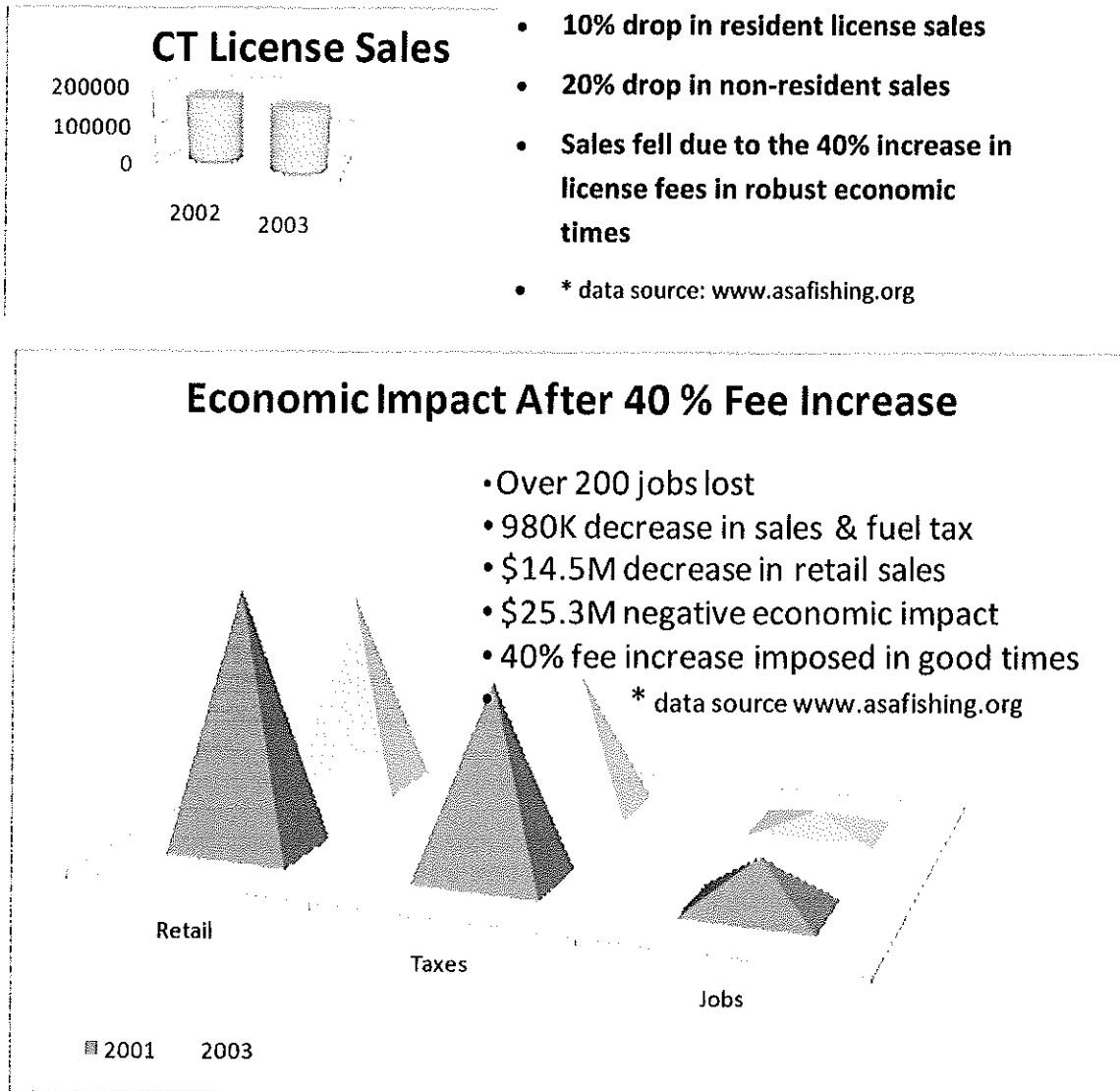
- **Over 45 projects have been conducted statewide (mostly on state-owned Wildlife Management Areas) resulting in over 3,145 acres of restored or enhanced wetlands.**
- Two specialized low-ground pressure marsh restoration machines were purchased.
- A 75-acre addition to the Wangunk Meadows Wildlife Management Area in Portland was purchased.
- Restoration of over 300 acres at Great Island WMA in Old Lyme in partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ducks Unlimited (DU), and the Connecticut Water Fowlers Association (CWA).
- Restoration of over 150 acres at East River WMA in Guilford.
- Restoration of 80 acres at Quinnipiac Meadows WMA in North Haven.

- Other sites enhanced by Duck Stamp Funds, Hale Marsh in Natchaug SF, Wickaboxet Marsh and Sue Hopkins in Pachaug SF, Dodge Marsh in Nehantic SF, Hackney and Cockaponsett #2 in Conckaponsett SF, Roy Swamp, Pine Swamp, Beaver Marsh in Housatonic SF, Higganum Meadows WMA in Haddam, along with many others.

#### Key Points Regarding the Value of the Duck Stamp Program

- *The DEP's nationally recognized Wetlands Restoration Unit receives no state funds and operates solely off of outside revenue sources, primarily grants and the Duck Stamp fund. Thus, the loss of the Duck Stamp funds will reduce and limit the State's ability to conduct critical wetland restoration work.*
- *The Duck Stamp Program has been able to bankroll wetland projects that were delayed, or required a long time frame to complete. Without the Duck Stamp Program to pay upfront costs, some projects would not have been possible (e.g., Babcock Pond Wildlife Management Area in Colchester).*
- *Duck Stamp funds have been used as required "match" for grant dollars. To date nearly \$900,000. of Duck Stamp funds have been used on projects with a total cost of \$3 million dollars. Thus, Connecticut got over a 3:1 return on Duck Stamp monies.*
- *The wetland restoration work that the Duck Stamp Program has funded has benefited many wildlife species including several designated as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.*
- *Duck Stamp Program projects have provided many positive benefits to the public. For example, several projects have resulted in the removal of hundreds of acres of 10-15 feet tall Phragmites (an invasive non-native plant) thereby enhancing scenic vistas. Also, the improved habitats resulting from projects have benefited various recreational uses of many areas such as hunting, birding and kayaking.*
- *Currently, about 6,000 duck stamps are sold annually. AT \$15.00 APIECE THE MAXIMUM ANNUAL REVENUE GENERATED TO THE GENERAL FUND WOULD BE \$90,000. THIS IS INSIGNIFICANT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STATE BUDGET. (Revenues will likely be less than \$90,000. as many sportsmen will no longer purchase stamps due to the increased cost and because the funds will no longer be used for their intended purpose – wetland conservation.)*
- *However, DUCK STAMP FUNDS HAVE BEEN VERY SIGNIFICANT TO WETLAND CONSERVATION IN CONNNECTICUT.*
- *Therefore, THE DUCK STAMP ADVISORY BOARD STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THAT THE NECESSARY STEPS BE TAKEN TO REVERT THE DUCK STAMP PROGRAM BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL INTENT WHEREBY FUNDS ARE USED FOR WETLAND CONSERVATION.*

## **Sportsman Fee Increases Negatively Impact State Revenue**



### **Conclusion:**

2010 Promises to be difficult for CT citizens as well as the state budget. A 100% increase in sportsman's fees will drive many sportsmen away from their sport, and others to neighboring states. While fee revenue may increase in 2010, an understanding of the 2003 data promises a loss of economic output and state revenue that dwarfs the extra fee income.